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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000633

SIPDIS

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USNATO FOR POL
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SUBJECT: DELEGATIONS ENCOURAGE INCREASED ARMENIAN
ENGAGEMENT WITH NATO PFP

REF: A) STATE 44628 B) 03 STATE 325116 C) YEREVAN 615

Classified By: Ambassador John Ordway for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) An interagency delegation met with the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense March 11 to outline a United States proposal to shift the focus of NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) activities to the Caucasus and Central Asia. The delegation also discussed the necessity to reach a compromise with Azerbaijan over the NATO PfP Cooperative Best Effort 04 exercises with the GOAM officials. Two visiting professors from the National Defense University also visited Yerevan March 10-11 to discuss enhanced NATO PfP activities with GOAM officials. END SUMMARY.

DELEGATIONS PROMOTE INCREASED NATO FOCUS IN CAUCASUS

2. (C) An interagency delegation including Eric Schultz (Deputy Director, EUR/RPM), Bruce Rogers (Deputy Polad, USNATO), and Dennis Skocz (OSD, NATO Policy Office) met with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Tatul Margarian and Deputy Minister of Defense Artur Aghabekian March 11 to discuss and solicit Armenia's support for the U.S. proposed shift in PfP focus to the Caucasus and Central Asia regions (refs A and B). The delegation sought to gain Armenia's support for a regional NATO liaison office that could better shape NATO PfP programs to Armenia's needs, encourage defense reform, and promote greater military interoperability with NATO forces. The delegation also encouraged the GOAM officials to reach a compromise with Azerbaijan over the continuing dispute over the upcoming Cooperative Best Effort 2004 (CBE 04) exercises to be held in Azerbaijan. The delegation relayed a compromise proposed by Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov, whereby Azerbaijan would allow two Armenian officers to attend the conference as "participants" in another country's military unit, and urged Margarian and Aghabekian to give it full consideration.

3. (SBU) National Defense University professors Dr. Eugene Rumer and Dr. Jeffrey Simon also visited Yerevan March 10-11 to discuss ways to make the Partnership for Peace program more relevant to the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia and solicited advice on how NATO can modify the PfP program to address the new global security environment. Rumer and Simon met with Margarian and Aghabekian, as well as Mher Shadelghian, Chairman of the National Assembly's Defense Committee.

USG DELEGATION SOLICITS GOAM OPINIONS ON PFP AND CBE 04

4. (C) Margarian told the USG delegation that the GOAM supported the U.S. proposal for a strategic shift in PfP, saying that Armenia had been in favor of such an approach for over a year. He said Armenia not only favored closer ties with NATO but was also interested in membership someday and in that regard was prepared to work seriously on the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). He said Armenia would welcome a NATO liaison office in the Caucasus, preferably one in-country, which would more effectively meet Armenia's needs. Margarian said that if a regional office was established in Tbilisi, he would expect its staff to spend approximately equal time every month in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Margarian further suggested that the United States and NATO better define what is meant by "increased engagement" with the region. He said he understood that it is important to begin a "process" of cooperation but that his colleagues in the MOD and elsewhere in the GOAM take these proposals very seriously, and would require an explanation of what concrete programs and initiatives would be included.

5. (C) Margarian initially said Armenia would stick to PfP

principles and continue to press for full participation in CBE 04. He reminded the delegation that Armenia had extended an invitation to Azerbaijan to participate in the CBE 03 hosted in Armenia, and had accepted Turkish soldiers as participants in the same exercises, both politically difficult decisions to take. Margarian pointed out that NATO was a possible forum to bring the two countries together, but Azerbaijan continued to resist any cooperation and seemed intent on excluding Armenia from NATO and PfP. (Note. Margarian made the same argument in a meeting with a delegation from the United States Air War College the previous week. End Note.) Margarian acknowledged Schultz's point that if the exercises were canceled, no one would win and that other NATO allies might use the failure of CBE 04 as a reason to oppose further cooperation with the region, including other PfP exercises. Margarian said the decision would rest with the MOD, noting that they would need to be convinced to send two officers rather than five to seven.

MOD OFFERS COUNTER-PROPOSAL ON CBE 04

16. (C) Deputy Defense Minister Artur Aghabekian emphasized that cooperation with NATO under the PfP program is one of the key elements of Armenia's security strategy. Addressing concerns that Armenia is not as active as other countries in PfP, Aghabekian noted that Armenia prefers to take time to review thoroughly the feasibility of an endeavor prior to committing to action. This is one reason why Armenia signed up for NATO's Planning and Review Process (PARP) later than its neighbors. Armenia also had to deal with a society that has always identified NATO with Turkey and committing to closer ties with NATO was not necessarily a popular decision in Armenia. This same deliberative process is underway concerning Armenia's first Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), but that Armenia did plan to submit one in the near future. Aghabekian stated that he understood NATO's logic in placing the first office in Tbilisi and he believed this would be a good first step toward regional cooperation.

17. (C) Regarding CBE 04, Aghabekian stated that Armenia would not agree to being limited to observer status for the exercise, since Armenia had allowed Turkish participation in Yerevan last year. At a reception later in the evening, Aghabekian informed DAO that Armenia could accept sending three officers to the exercise as participants (see reftel C.)

NDU PROFESSORS SEEK PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE PFP PROGRAM

18. (C) While meeting with Professors Rumer and Simon, neither Margarian nor Aghabekian offered any concrete proposals for improving the PfP program, but each stated that PfP remains the only viable forum for advancing cooperation in the region. When asked about the possibility of Armenia supporting a Greater Black Sea Ministerial process, neither Margarian nor Aghabekian showed any particular interest toward the idea, but both stated that they would not be opposed to such an initiative and that any new initiatives would be examined on their merits. Both emphasized that Armenia views PfP as the best method of pursuing regional security through cooperative programs. Shadelghian and Aghabekian felt that regional cooperation should be pursued in the area of crisis response/disaster management.

COMMENT

19. (C) The visit of the USG and NDU delegations provided GOAM officials with an opportunity to discuss their commitment to enhancing cooperative efforts with NATO through the PfP framework. The GOAM seems firmly behind initiatives to expand on their NATO relationship, though officials still seek further elucidation on what PfP's "strategic shift" means and entails for Armenia. Importantly, the GOAM seems willing to step back from some of its rhetoric over the CBE 04 exercises and accept a compromise solution that allows the Azerbaijani government to save some face. Furthermore, the MFA and MOD also seem willing to move past the February 18 Budapest murder, and fully engage in PfP activities.

10. (U) RPM: Eric Schultz_ has cleared this telegram.

ORDWAY